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ABSTRACT

Community college faculty play a vital role in the establishment and continuation of industry training programs. Faculty assist the company in determining the level, focus, and starting point of the course or program; develop instructional materials and techniques; present the subject; and interact with employee-students. During the delivery of the course or program, they must demonstrate their expertise and, concomitantly, the worth of the institution. The faculty member who teaches partnership courses must have a sense of entrepreneurship and corporate culture; must be flexible, responsive, personable, and a realistic teacher; must be well versed in both theory and the workplace applications of that theory; and must be able to adapt his/her instructional methods to mature students with varying educational backgrounds and immediate educational needs. Recruiting and maintaining the interest of such faculty members is facilitated by the sense of novelty and challenge afforded by the change in setting and clientele, the ability to use the latest equipment, access to the firm's internal training classes, and additional income. Some practical problems may result from the partnership programs, including conflicts between the firm and academic departments over teacher selection, scheduling problems, the lack of experienced instructors, and the lack of policies on workload and compensation. Faculty excellence is the key to resolving these problems and providing successful training programs. (EJV)

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The Vital Role of Faculty in Developing Successful Relationships with Business and Industry

A Roundtable Presentation
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by

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The Vital Role of Faculty in Developing Successful Partnerships with Business and Industry

Introduction

Monroe Community College (MCC) in Rochester, New York has established many successful partnerships with local business and industry -- e.g., Eastman Kodak, General Motors, Xerox, and Bausch & Lomb, to name just a few. These partnerships have had a significant impact on the economic development of our region, primarily through numerous **training**, retraining, small business development, and dislocated workers programs.

Role of Faculty -- Prime Factor in the Success of Partnerships

The role of the faculty is a very important factor in the establishment and continuation of partnerships with industry. This is evident on several levels. The faculty member is the subject matter expert. It is up to the faculty to successfully interface with the company subject matter experts in order for the college to get the proper respect it deserves as an appropriate educational and training institution. Although the college's program coordinators act as facilitators in bringing the experts from the college and the company together, it is up to the faculty member to prove to the firm that the college can deliver the service needed.

During the delivery of the course or program the faculty member must continue to demonstrate his/her expertise and, therefore, the worth of the institution. If the faculty member is not current with the technology and able to convey knowledge to an audience who may be familiar with the subject, the institution could lose its credibility with that company.

The faculty member may be called upon to assist the company in directing the level, focus, and starting point of the training. An example of this type of effort is Blueprint Reading. A company may believe that if their employees are taught to read blueprints their training needs have been met. On the contrary, in many cases faculty members have discovered that employees first must be taught basic math skills in order to fully comprehend the blueprint reading; and then, in order to fully utilize the blueprints, they must understand geometric tolerancing. Without a faculty member with a strong knowledge in the subject and its application in the workplace the training provided may not be effective. Of course, that would reflect poorly on the educational agency and would not truly assist the company with its needs. The faculty involved in these programs must have a strong customer service orientation in order for an optimum partnership to be established.

Qualities of Faculty Involved in Partnerships

Faculty members who teach these courses/programs are very special. They have a sense of entrepreneurship and are particularly sensitive to the corporate culture. They should be the college's best teachers -- flexible, responsive, personable, and realistic. They are faculty who stimulate, motivate, entertain, and involve the class in serious discussion and dialogue. They put in a great deal of extra time in preparation, make clear and understandable presentations, are "quick on their feet," never talk down to the students and are excellent listeners.

It is very important to choose the best faculty possible to work with local firms. Care must be taken to select someone who will match up well with the particular clientele requesting the training as well as being knowledgeable in the subject matter. In every case, the teacher should be dynamic, understand the theory of the material, and, most importantly, be able to apply the theory to the workplace.

Instructors must be able to adapt to the level of the participants, levels which may range from those without high school diplomas to Ph.D.'s. Flexibility and variation in instructional methodology is essential and will depend on the material, length of class sessions, and length of the program, as well as on the participants. Faculty must relate well to mature students. It cannot be overemphasized that the faculty must be able to demonstrate the application of the training to the students' actual job activities. When students return to their jobs after the training session, they expect to put their training experience into practice immediately.

Recruiting and Maintaining Faculty Interest

Since the faculty play such a vital role in the partnership, an important activity is recruiting and then keeping faculty interested and involved. Many community college faculty have been teaching roughly the same subject matter to typical college-age students for many years, and the prospect of teaching different material in a different setting to different clientele is challenging and stimulating. That is, these partnerships offer a sense of novelty along with a sense of worth and contribution.

Another inducement is that industry is often far ahead of educational agencies in the use of the latest equipment. Many faculty members enjoy and welcome the opportunity to examine and work on state-of-the-art equipment. This benefits industry because someone who is trained and comfortable with the transfer of knowledge can instruct their employees. The teacher benefits from the opportunity to be exposed to new technologies they may only have read about, and the educational agency benefits because its faculty are "up to speed" with the marketplace.

We in Upstate New York, in conjunction with the Finger Lakes Regional Education Center for Economic Development, have been able to offer our faculty another benefit resulting from corporate partnerships. Through a New York State grant to MCC in cooperation with Eastman Kodak, programs from across the country are teleconferenced to the Rochester area, video taped, and made available to our faculty. These tapes have been produced by nationally known experts in various disciplines. Through the Association for Media-Based Continuing Education for Engineers (AMCEE), MCC, and the Regional Center these programs are then offered to other public sector teachers throughout the State as well as our own faculty.

Another incentive results when a company invites college faculty to attend the firm's internal training classes. Such cooperative arrangements provide outstanding professional growth opportunities for faculty.

Yet another factor that keeps faculty interested in partnership programs is the prospect of working with a different clientele. In many cases, faculty have expressed that such programs are enjoyable because of the enthusiasm of the participants. Teaching a class where the participants may have a wealth of knowledge in a subject area keeps instructors "on their toes." It's a challenge when the class doesn't accept without question what a faculty member presents. It's a challenge when the class adopts the attitude of "who are you to come into our workplace and tell us how to do it." Many of our instructors find these challenges a welcome and exciting change from the routine of their traditional classes.

Also, from a more practical viewpoint, faculty have an opportunity to earn additional income from such endeavors as well as to make contacts for future consulting, training activities and summer employment.

Challenges Related to Faculty Involvement in Partnerships

There are some practical problems related to choosing faculty to teach in these partnership programs. For instance, the company may actually request a specific faculty member to be the trainer. This may not present a problem if the faculty member is available either as part of his/her regular workload or on an overload basis. However, if faculty schedules have been established within the department or if it's the middle of a semester, the department chairperson may find it objectionable to make the necessary accommodations, especially if it means the loss of a "star" faculty member to the primary clientele within the department. Also, it puts pressure on the other department members to cover the regular credit courses formerly scheduled to be taught by their business/industry colleague.

Another practical problem relates to who selects the appropriate faculty to provide the training for a company. The firm, the program coordinator and the academic department must work together cooperatively (and usually very quickly) to choose the best match of faculty with training needs. This process is not always easily accomplished and all parties need to be sensitive to each others concerns. Care should be taken not to adopt a system of seniority or rotation since not all faculty are readily adaptable to these special programs or their clientele.

Related to the scheduling problem is an attitude problem which may be difficult to overcome. Faculty may feel that business/industry programs are competing for "scarce" resources and may feel threatened by the potential loss of these resources to their program or department. Such faculty may not support the business/industry programs and, in the extreme, may even put up barriers and roadblocks. In reality, faculty need to realize that these new non-credit (and often contract) courses and programs are an important part of the mission of the comprehensive community college.

Selecting excellent faculty for these special programs will be a continuing challenge since the requests for training and retraining programs are steadily increasing. The better we do the job, the more likely the firms will want us to do even more. Therefore, it's important to develop a cadre of faculty qualified to meet these needs. It is suggested that special sessions be scheduled for faculty in order to share the experiences that the "stars" have had with business/industry. Also, these experienced faculty need to invite other faculty to assist them or team teach with them in order to get a taste of what these programs are like. Another good technique for recruiting additional faculty is for the experienced faculty to request the potential faculty member to critique a presentation or review instructional material.

The development of policies on workload and compensation relative to partnership program/courses is particularly challenging. These policies should be flexible yet fair and consistent. If the college has a faculty union it will probably be necessary to negotiate these items. Care should be taken to protect the institution's ability to respond rapidly and effectively to a company's request for a particular training program. Also, such policies should differentiate between credit and non-credit courses -- e.g., payment for non-credit courses usually differs from payment for credit courses. Also, credit courses offered to a firm may be taught as part of a faculty member's base workload while, on the other hand, applying non-credit courses toward fulfillment of workload obligations may be quite difficult. Whatever policies on workload and compensation are developed, it is important that appropriate incentives are provided so that qualified faculty will continue to support business/industry partnerships.

Compensation of faculty may also depend on what can be negotiated with the company relative to instructional costs and may depend on "what the market can bear." A word of caution -- most firms are suspicious of the quality of instruction if the college offers the program at too low a cost. Of course, faculty compensation also depends on supply and demand -- an expert in optical imaging may demand a higher salary than one in a more popular or less technical discipline. Generally, arrangements can be made so that faculty compensation is reasonable to the firm and attractive for the faculty member.

Such concerns about workload and compensation need to be carefully analyzed so that faculty will feel they are being properly rewarded for the efforts they put into these programs. Squabbles will be minimized and support by the faculty will be optimized.

Summary

Although many individuals from both the company and the college may be involved in training programs, the role of the faculty is a prime factor in the success of such partnerships. Faculty play a vital role in deciding the content of the course/progam, developing the materials and instructional techniques, presenting the subject matter and relating to the students. Faculty excellence is the key ingredient in providing successful training programs and, as such, significantly reflects upon the community college and its mission.

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